

**Record: 1**

NOWRUZ Afghans Celebrate Renewal. By: Trippe-McRee, Kathy. Faces (07491387), Mar2006, Vol. 22 Issue 7, p34-37, 4p, 5 color; Abstract: The article reports that Afghans celebrate the ancient Persian holiday of Nowruz on March 21. Nowruz, which means "new day," marks the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere, as it tilts toward the sun. Customs vary by region, but throughout Afghanistan women prepare lavish meals for family and friends. Afghans added a uniquely Afghan and Muslim tradition to Persian customs. "The Flag of Ali" flies at mosques and shrines around the country on Nowruz. In Mazar-e-Sharif, the Flag of Ali flies for 40 days at the Blue Mosque, where Ali is believed to be buried. Reading Level (Lexile): 920; (AN 20088756)

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**NOWRUZ Afghans Celebrate Renewal**

As winter melts into spring, schools and businesses close and Afghans celebrate the ancient Persian holiday of Nowruz (nah-ROOZ) on March 21. Nowruz, which means "new day," marks the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere, as it tilts toward the sun.

Customs vary by region, but throughout Afghanistan women prepare lavish meals for family and friends. Then Afghan families go outdoors to enjoy spring weather. They plant trees and flowers and go to carnivals and picnics. From 1994 to 2001, the Taliban attempted, with limited success, to ban Nowruz because it was not an Islamic holiday. Afghans had to forgo outdoor festivities, but they continued to entertain family and friends at festive meals inside.

Nowruz celebrations began about 650 B.C. in Persia, which included present-day Afghanistan. Persians measured time according to the sun's movements and developed a solar calendar. By contrast, the Islamic calendar marks time according to the phases of the moon. Islam's lunar year 1427 began on January 30, 2006 (solar time). Although Nowruz is Persian rather than Islamic, Afghans weave Islam into Nowruz with flag ceremonies at their mosques and shrines.

Like holidays the world over, Nowruz requires planning. Afghans clean house thoroughly. If possible, parents purchase new clothes and shoes for their children. Special Nowruz dishes take several days to prepare. Haft Miwa, or Seven Fruit Soup, marinates for two days to blend its ingredients' flavors. Samanu, sweet pudding made from sprouted wheat, cooks overnight for 12 hours. Women sing and tell traditional stories to pass the time these preparations require.

Warm, sunny days draw people outside. Families picnic and children play games, including one in which each child is given several hard-boiled eggs. One child will challenge another to a contest; then the two children tap their eggs together to see which egg cracks first. The loser, whose egg cracked, must give an egg to the winner. Children can challenge others to play as long as their egg supply lasts. Vendors sell cooked eggs to those who need more.

Some villages have outdoor fairs, where children enjoy simple wooden carnival rides such as a merry-go-round. Riders sit on swings suspended from beams attached, like spokes on a wheel, to a pole. The carousel moves as fast as the man pushing it can walk in a circle. Farmers hold parades at these fairs to show off livestock. Some even dye their animals special colors for the festival: Imagine sheep with purple wool and chickens with green feathers! Dealers sell vegetable seeds, flowers, and trees for people to take home for planting.

Afghans added a uniquely Afghan and Muslim tradition to Persian customs. "The Flag of Ali" (Ali was the son-in-law of Muhammad) flies at mosques and shrines around the country on Nowruz. The flag reminds Sunni and Shiite Muslims, factions dating from the death of Muhammad in A.D. 632, of their unity under Islam. Muhammad did not name a successor, and Muslim elders could not agree on a new leader. Sunnis argued that leaders could be elected, while Shiites stated that leaders should be Muhammad's descendants. In modern Afghanistan, the Sunni and Shiite factions stand together on Nowruz to watch the pink and green Flag of AH unfurl over their holy places. In Mazar-e-Sharif, the Flag of Ali flies for 40 days at the Blue Mosque, where Ali is believed to be buried.

On March 21, 2002, the Taliban was gone, so Afghans celebrated Persian New Year once again. This holiday held special significance in 2002. Families could gather outdoors once more. People planted trees to replace those destroyed during Taliban control. Sunnis and Shiites gathered all over Afghanistan to raise the Flag of Ali once more. Then-Interim President Hamid Karzai attended the ceremony at the Blue Mosque in Mazar-e-Sharif. Since 2002, Afghans have continued to celebrate new beginnings on Nowruz.

May your every day be Nowruz and may your Nowruz be victorious.

The vernal equinox is the first day of spring.

PHOTO (COLOR): Extended family, meaning aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, is very important in Afghan society.

PHOTO (COLOR): A people-powered merry-go-round is fun for kids celebrating Nowruz.

PHOTO (COLOR): This Afghan girl demonstrates her martial arts skills during Nowruz festivities.

PHOTO (COLOR): During Nowruz, Afghans kiss a flagpole at the Karte-Sakhi shrine in Kabul to show their love for Islam.

PHOTO (COLOR)

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By Kathy Trippe-McRee

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